



## Greater Yellowstone Coalition

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TO: Members of the House Natural Resources Committee  
FR: Patricia Dowd, Montana Conservation Coordinator, Greater Yellowstone Coalition  
DA: February 18, 2009  
RE: House Bill 425, Public Notice for Oil/Gas Leases on State Lands

Please accept this written testimony on behalf of Greater Yellowstone Coalition (GYC).

GYC is a non-profit, conservation organization with a membership of approximately 12,600 individuals, 100 local, regional, and national conservation organizations and 120 business sponsors committed to protecting and preserving the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem.

Our members and supporters live and work in Yellowstone, Sweetgrass, Park, Gallatin, Madison and Beaverhead Counties among other counties in Montana. My testimony reflects the concerns of our membership.

Last year nearly two million acres of state lands in Montana were leased for oil and gas drilling. In many instances leasing occurred in places where oil & gas drilling had not previously taken place, such as Bridger Canyon outside of Bozeman, on the banks of the Yellowstone River east of Livingston, and in the middle of a critical wildlife migration corridor in the Centennial Valley.

This new development took landowners and the public by surprise. They felt uninformed. There was no set process in place to notify the public that oil & gas leasing was going to occur in their backyard, or along one of their favorite rivers. The process of notifying landowners and the public on oil & gas leasing was flawed.

House Bill 455 seeks to establish a simple, straightforward process that will provide landowners and the public with clear information on where and when oil & gas leases will occur.

HB 455 essentially codifies the process the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) used during its December 2008 lease sale. It is a process that promotes open government and transparency regarding where and how oil & gas leasing will take place on our state lands in Montana.

GYC supports fair and open government practices and believes the public is best served when it is informed.

GYC supports the provisions outlined in HB 455. Specifically, we support inclusion of an area map of each tract offered for sale as outlined in the bill, Section 1(6).

*"The notice required by subsection (5) must contain the time and place of the sale, a statement that all sales will be by competitive oral bidding, and a description and area map of each tract offered for sale."*

Including a map is an essential part of the notification process. In the past, DNRC notified the public on leases by listing the legal address of the proposed tracts. I don't know about you, but I am not familiar enough with legal addresses to read the description then immediately identify the location.

For example, if the following legal address was listed in the newspaper would you know where it was?

Legal address: Lewis & Clark County T10NR03W (Township 10 North; Range 03 West),  
Section 32

This of course, is the State Capitol. Street Address: 1301 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Helena, MT 59601.

If DNRC lists the legal address of proposed tracts and provides a map showing the vicinity where tracts are being offered for lease, it would provide the public with a clear picture of what is occurring on state lands in the county where they live.

GYC is asking the legislature to give the public the opportunity to be more informed and to improve communication between state government and the public.

By supporting HB 425, you will be giving the public access to clear information regarding the management of our state lands.

Thank you for your consideration and for your vote on HB 425.